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SHAW'S DOCTRINE OF REALISM IN
CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

July

1958

VITA AUCTORIS

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in his plays--Walter Kerr's avowed that it
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"God . . . made for Shaw, caught him by the beard, saying, 'Go up, my Irish son, and show, Shaw, what my Theatre should be, can be, for you're the one to do it.' And the great man went up to do what he had been bidden to do, making once more the Theatre a fit place for man and God to go, to laugh, and to think out life as life was lived."

—Sean O'Casey

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: STATEMENT OF THE THESIS

George Bernard Shaw fancied himself a philosopher who only used the theater as a medium for expressing his philosophical thought. Many critics think that Mr. Shaw deluded himself if he thought for one moment that he was anything but a first-class clown. The problem arises, then, as to whether Shaw actually was a philosopher and whether or not he really used his philosophy in writing his delightful plays.

The answer to that problem which the present writer proposes may be worded in the following thesis: George Bernard Shaw did try to develop his own philosophy and he did try to express it in his plays. It is not necessary, however, to understand his philosophy in order to appreciate his plays.

Shaw can only be called a philosopher in the wide sense of the word. He dabbled in Nietzsche, Marx, and other modern philosophers, but his own thought was inconsistent and confused. Shaw wrote prefaces to his plays in which he put forth the notions which he wished to stress in his plays. But he became so engrossed in the fascinating plots and characters which he devised, that he usually forgot all about the philosophical implications which the plays were intended by

their author to have.

In some plays of Shaw the astute observer will find passages which are unintelligible without recourse to Shaw's philosophical theories. But these passages, and other inconsistencies in Shaw's plays, are apparent only in a more than casual study of Shaw's works. The ordinary person who witnesses or reads a play by Shaw is not bothered by them in the least. In most instances, Shaw's philosophy can be completely ignored by one who wishes to be entertained by the master playwright.

If Shaw did not succeed in making his plays philosophical treatises, he did succeed in teaching the theater how to think. Before his time, no serious subjects were ever treated in plays. Because of the influence of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, the theater began to consider the serious problems of life as matter for dramatic presentation. Shaw perfected Ibsen's theory of playwrighting and began to treat of serious problems in his plays. He has, therefore, been credited with founding the modern theater of ideas on the English-speaking stage, particularly in the realm of comedy.

The present writer will examine in the following chapter the comedy of ideas, in which Shaw excelled. He will attempt to show how Shaw really intended to expound his philosophy in his plays. In the third chapter of the present thesis, there will be a consideration of the broad outlines of Shaw's

philosophy. Such a study enables one to know what to look for when he examines a play by Shaw. The fourth and fifth chapters will be devoted to a consideration of one play of Shaw's, Caesar and Cleopatra. In these two chapters the present writer will try to apply Shaw's philosophy to the principal characters of Caesar and Cleopatra. He will then be able to show in what respects Shaw's handling of these two characters is in keeping with his philosophy, and in what respects Shaw seems to either have departed from, or completely forgotten about, his philosophy.

The final chapter of this thesis will endeavor to compare the characters of Caesar and Cleopatra, since they have been studied separately in the preceding chapters. By way of conclusion, that chapter will present briefly the arguments for and against the present writer's thesis, namely, that Shaw used his philosophy in his plays, but it is not necessary to understand his philosophy in order to understand his plays. There are those who say that Shaw was not a philosopher in any sense of the word. There are also those who say that Shaw was a serious thinker, and that his plays reflect his thought. This writer believes that the real answer to the problem lies somewhere between these two opinions, as he will point out in the final chapter of the thesis.

It must be noted here that the author of this thesis has chosen to consider only one play of Shaw's, Caesar and

Cleopatra, for purposes of conciseness and simplicity. This does not mean, however, that the general principles about Shaw and his philosophy drawn from a study of Caesar and Cleopatra do not apply to Shaw's other plays. At the conclusion of the thesis there will be a brief mention of some of Shaw's other works, in order to show that what is said here about Caesar and Cleopatra is true of Shaw's other major plays as well.

CHAPTER II

THE COMEDY OF IDEAS

"To make my readers realize what a philosopher is, I can only say that I am a philosopher."¹ Thus wrote George Bernard Shaw in 1896. He continues by saying that he is not a bookworm philosopher who locks himself in his library and builds "some silly systematization of his worthless ideas over the abyss of his own nescience."² On the contrary, Shaw styles himself a true philosopher, who develops his thought with an open mind and through conversation with real people.

Of all the titles Shaw accorded to himself—novelist, sociologist, critic, statesman, dramatist, philosopher—most people are willing to grant him all save the last. For Shaw is rarely thought of as a philosopher by those who have read and seen his plays. After all, who could believe that a philosopher could clown, or a clown philosophize?

Yet, imbedded deep within his plays, and especially in the prefaces to those plays, is a philosophical system which Shaw

¹Quoted by Arthur H. Nethercott, "Bernard Shaw, Philosopher," PMLA, LXIX (March 1954), 57.

²Ibid.

developed for himself. Fragmentary and disorganized though it may be, the philosophy of Shaw developed throughout his life as he became more and more acquainted with the chief names in modern philosophy, and he sincerely believed that his plays were but the sounding board for his philosophy.

The early tracts which he wrote, and which went unread, reappeared as prefaces to such plays as Candida and Saint Joan. Other prefaces, like that of Caesar and Cleopatra, were written especially for the play in question, though often after the play had been completed. "His characters were as carefully selected for their functional purposes as pieces on a chessboard, whose brilliant dialogue never obscured the underlying debate nor impeded the progress toward the preconceived conclusion—which was never the one which the audience had already drawn."³

Through his plays Shaw wished to reach a much larger audience than had ever heard him as a platform orator. He wished his hearers to carry away with them his notions on poverty, class distinction, the after-life, statesmanship, war, and a hundred other topics. He wished to criticize before their eyes the social institutions which he believed to be at the root of the world's miseries.

³Louis F. Doyle, "G. B. S. 's Lance against the Windmills," America, XCV (September 29, 1956), 622.

In her biography of Chesterton, Maisie Ward has made the following comparison between the two men:

There were certainly some who were angry because they thought chaos must follow any tampering with the existing social order. But if you take the mass of those who tried to laugh Bernard Shaw aside and became angry when they could not do so, you find at the root of the anger an intense dislike of having any part of a system questioned which was to them unquestionable, which they had erected into a creed. . . . They hated Shaw's questions before they began to hate his answers. And that is probably why so many linked Chesterton with Shaw—he gave different answers, but he was asking many of the same questions.⁴

Indeed, few people with a basic Christian morality could accept some of the answers Shaw was giving to contemporary problems.

He believed poverty, for example, was fatal to human society.

"That is the main reason that made Shaw—a born communist, as he called himself—into a practical and energetic socialist."⁵

But the important thing is that he was asking important questions, even though his answers were not always the best. Like Erasmus before him, and Sinclair Lewis after him, he wished to stir people up to thinking about and solving the problems which he presented, even though they need not necessarily accept his solutions.

Anne Fremantle says, "Shaw never would have agreed

⁴Maisie Ward, Gilbert Keith Chesterton (New York, 1943), p. 224.

⁵Sean O'Casey, The Green Crow (New York, 1956), p. 199.

to enforce any faith. His whole object, in all his plays, was to make people use their freedom and by shocking, amusing or instructing them, to bring them to the exercise of their God-given reason. He rubbed peoples' noses in slums, malnutrition, poverty, disease, and dirt, because he wished them to care enough to do away with all of these."⁶

All of Shaw's plays, then, are "plays with a purpose." In forms more or less veiled, they seek to establish some argumentative thesis or rhetorical appeal. According to Archibald Henderson, his "authorized biographer," Shaw was virtually alone in trying to open the windows of the theater to a fresh and vivifying current of ideas. "To him, to dramatize was to philosophize."⁷ He used comedy, as did the classical writers, to chasten morals. He declared his purpose in these significant words: "It is an instinct with me personally to attack every idea which has been full grown for ten years, especially if it claims to be the foundation of all human society. I am prepared to back human society against any idea, positive or negative, that can be brought into the field against it."⁸

⁶Anne Fremantle, "Shaw and Religion," Commonweal, LXVII (December 6, 1957), 251.

⁷Archibald Henderson, George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century (New York, 1956), p. 411.

⁸Ibid., pp. 411-412.

Hence John Gassner does not hesitate to call Bernard Shaw the virtual creator of the modern comedy of ideas.⁹ Although Shaw was inconsistent in his thinking and fluctuated between socialist idealism and superman-worship, between faith in social democracy at one time and in dictatorship at another, his main objective never changed: the building up of the "good society."

The Shavian comedy of ideas relied upon exposition, situation, and discussion. Up to his time the formula had been exposition, development, and resolution—the type of thing employed by playwrights like Henry Arthur Jones just before the advent of Shaw. Jones just wanted to present and resolve a plot. Shaw's formula was geared to enlighten and stimulate his audience to serious thought. To do this he needed a new kind of dialogue, one which would possess sparkle and intellectual vigor.

Shaw needed a new kind of logic. The logic of a play before Shaw's time merely referred to the fact that a play, like a mathematical system, must have internal consistency, whether it applied to the real world in which we live or not. But to Shaw the logic of the play meant that it should fit into the scheme of everyday life as it was lived outside the

⁹ John Gassner, A Treasury of the Theater: From Ghosts to Death of a Salesman, 3rd ed. (New York, 1956), p. 539.

theater. In other words, Shaw's logic considered the milieu from which human beings acquire their manners and beliefs, their problems, their social status and livelihood, and their ideas. "The modern use of logic involved, in addition, the free play of critical reason on habitual life and thought, the pleasure of keen argument, the delight in the exchange or conflict of opinions."¹⁰

Shaw therefore takes Shakespeare to task for not expressing in his plays a clearly defined philosophical system such as Shaw himself wished to present. Such a reasoned philosophy is far from being indispensable to the dramatist, and Shakespeare seems to have gotten along very nicely without one. Shaw, however, wished to substitute for Shakespeare's conventional ethics and romantic logic "natural history," his term for a realism that does not degenerate to mere verisimilitude. His aim is toward "genuinely scientific natural history," by which he means "a drama that is true to life in parable, not an accurate picture or transcription."¹¹

Shaw writes in his Preface to Caesar and Cleopatra, "Better than Shakespear?"¹² that his stories and characters are the

¹⁰Ibid., p. 502.

¹¹Albert H. Silverman, "Bernard Shaw's Shakespeare Criticism," PMLA, LXXVII (September 1957), 727.

¹²George Bernard Shaw, Three Plays for Puritans (London, 1947), p. xxxv. All citations from the play and Preface will refer to this edition. The Preface will be referred to as "Better?" and the play as Caesar. Note Shaw's spelling of Shakespeare.

old ones revived with and for the spirit of his times. That is why Shaw did not hesitate to write about characters about whom many had thought that Shakespeare had had the last word, such as Caesar and Cleopatra.

Most people, in their dismay that Shaw would ever venture to compare himself to Shakespeare, fail to notice the question mark in the title of the essay, "Better than Shakespear?" Shaw replies to the question in the negative:

It does not follow, however, that the right to criticize Shakespear involves the power of writing better plays. And in fact—do not be surprised at my modesty—I do not profess to write better plays. . . . But the humblest author, and much more a rather arrogant one like myself, may profess to have something to say by this time that neither Homer nor Shakespear said. And the playgoer may reasonably ask to have historical events and persons presented to him in the light of his own time, even though Homer and Shakespear have already shewn them in the light of their time.¹³

Thus Shaw believed that, by using old stories dressed up for modern audiences in order to express his philosophy and modern outlook on the age-old problems of life, he was making a true contribution to the art of drama. Shaw wished to replace Shakespeare with his "natural history," but this was not a naturalism akin to that of Zola. Shaw wished to do more than just present a "slice of life" without further comment on what was presented. If "external naturalism" meant to express or

¹³Shaw, "Better?" pp. xxxi, xxxiii-xxxiv.

describe, Shaw intended by his "internal naturalism" to express the inner meaning of what he portrayed.

What makes Shaw seem new, then, is his anti-romanticism. Romance is the precise term for what Shaw criticizes in Shakespeare. "Caesar and Cleopatra is clearly an attempt to substitute realism for romance; it deliberately avoids sexual passion for statesmanship. Caesar is unromantic and fatherly toward Cleopatra, and his actions in the play militate against all romance, including romantic fictions about the way human affairs are to be regulated."¹⁴

Caesar and Cleopatra is a good play in which to study Shaw's utilization of his theory of the comedy of ideas. Here Shaw has taken characters who were romanticized by Shakespeare and turned them into mouthpieces and exponents of his philosophy. Or has he? That is the question at issue. Shaw went so far as to say that Caesar and Cleopatra is the first and only adequate dramatization of Julius Caesar ever written. Years later, however, he was forced to admit that this was "a frightfully foolish remark if I ever made it."¹⁵

¹⁴Silverman, p. 729.

¹⁵Hesketh Pearson, G.B.S.: A Full Length Portrait (New York, 1942), p. 189.

CHAPTER III

SHAW'S DOCTRINE OF REALISM

Before one can study the play Caesar and Cleopatra to see if Shaw really put his philosophy into the play—as he himself thought he did, one must turn to that philosophy and briefly sketch the main tenets which it comprises. Then it will be possible to look for traces of it in the play.

Shaw's philosophy is derived mainly from five philosophers and one playwright.¹ With Rousseau, Shaw believed that man is good by nature. He therefore agreed with Henrik Ibsen when the latter declared that man should act according to his naturally good inclinations, and not be tied down by empty social conventions. Whatever development man has thus far been achieved has been through what Lamarck called "creative, purposeful evolution." Man can continue his progress toward higher perfection since he is endowed with reason, and can correct the mistakes of the Life Force, which, in Schopenhauer's conception, was irrational.

¹The present writer is indebted to Dr. Paul Hummert, of the English Department of Loyola University, Chicago, for much of the section on Shaw's philosophy and its antecedents.

Man can continue his evolutionary process by perfecting himself until he evolves into the superman which Nietzsche wrote about in his philosophy. Lastly, this gradual perfecting of man can only take place in a classless society, a place where men will be free to develop themselves. This notion Shaw drew from Marx.

Obviously, one can hardly expect to find all of this in Caesar and Cleopatra. But implicitly these are the ideas which provide the substratum for Shaw's thought. They must, therefore, be enlarged upon here.

To Rousseau, society seemed to have deteriorated through an obscuring of the mind which resulted from the loss of the innocence and goodness possessed by man in his original "state of nature." Man must "return to these elemental feelings and the instincts of the heart, in vigorous reaction against the corrupting customs, artificial standards, social degeneration" which now plague man.² So fully did Shaw make this idea his own that the preceding sentence might have been written by him. To understand what Caesar means, for example, when he begins talking in Caesar and Cleopatra about a "natural slaying," it will be necessary to recall these ideas of Rousseau.

²Horatio W. Dresser, A History of Modern Philosophy (New York, 1928), pp. 140-141.

It is easy to see why Shaw was immediately impressed by Ibsen when the latter began to declaim, through such plays as Ghosts and Hedda Gabler, that one should "be himself." That is, one should act according to his innately good inclinations, wherever they might lead him, however far they might take him from established codes of behavior. But more of Ibsen later.

From Lamarck Shaw drew the idea of organic evolution in the universe. Men produce great works just as women bring forth children, with great pain and labor. Man works just as hard when there is no chance for profit as when there is. Just as Lamarck believed that living organisms change because they want to through functional adaptation, so Shaw believed that there was purposeful change in the universe.

Henderson summarizes Shaw's philosophy by saying: "Purpose, Will, Life: these were the cornerstones of Shaw's philosophy. He recognized purpose and will in the world because he himself was conscious of purpose and will."³ Shaw identified himself with this purpose and made its fulfillment an act, not of self-sacrifice, but of self-realization. To Shaw, Schopenhauer's treatise on the World as Will is the complement to Lamarck's natural history; for Will is the driving force of Lamarckian evolution. Don Juan, perhaps,

³Henderson, p. 771.

speaks for Shaw in "Don Juan in Hell" when he says: "I enjoy the contemplation of that which interests me above all things: namely, Life: the force that ever strives to attain a greater power of contemplating itself. . . . In the Heaven I seek, there is no other joy. But there is the work of helping Life in its struggle upwards."⁴

From Schopenhauer Shaw got his notion that the Life Force is irrational, a blind striving. "The Life Force needs a brain, . . . lest in its ignorance it should resist itself."⁵ The Life Force has already made innumerable experiments, and through trial and error has finally produced man, its most successful attempt at realizing itself, because man has a brain. Man alone is endowed with reason. Therefore it is man who must correct the mistakes of the Life Force and help it to attain its final goal, the superman.⁶

"Thus the Life Force is God in the act of creating Himself."⁷ It is clear that not just any man will be capable of

⁴George Bernard Shaw, Man and Superman: A Comedy and a Philosophy (London, 1952), pp. 100-101. "Don Juan in Hell" is frequently performed as a separate play, although Shaw actually wrote it as the third act of Man and Superman, as a dream sequence. "Juan" will subsequently be referred to under the title of the whole play, Man and Superman, or simply as Man.

⁵Ibid., p. 101.

⁶The present writer wishes to thank Rev. Murel R. Vogel, S.J. Dean of the faculty of philosophy of West Baden College, for his advice regarding Shaw and modern philosophy.

⁷Henderson, p. 581.

aiding the Life Force in its struggle upwards towards thought, which to Shaw is the highest good, but the philosophic man—"he who seeks in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world, in invention to discover the means of fulfilling that will, and in action to do that will by the so-discovered means."⁸ To Life, the force behind man, intellect is a necessity. Just as through creative evolution the Life Force developed the organ of sight, the bodily eye, "so it is evolving today a mind's eye that shall see, not the physical world, but the purpose of Life, and thereby enable the individual to work for that purpose instead of thwarting and baffling it by setting up shortsighted personal aims as at present."⁹

Shaw would not accept Schopenhauer's thesis that the will is self-defeating, but turned to Nietzsche for the idea that the will is good and would continue until it had produced the superman, who would be as superior to man as he now exists as man is to the ape.¹⁰ Perhaps Shaw was expressing his own mind when he has Don Juan say in Man and Superman:

⁸ Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 110.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Cf. William Kelley Wright, A History of Modern Philosophy (New York, 1941), p. 393.

Don Juan. I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the law of my life. That is the working within me of Life's incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding.¹¹

Thoughts like these will be heard from the lips of Julius Caesar as he tries to impart to the ordinary people around him the wisdom which is his. But—one might immediately interject—Shaw's doctrine is one of progress. Certainly Julius Caesar could not be a superior being in Shaw's opinion since he lived so long ago.

Shaw would reply that up to now progress has consisted in the swinging back and forth of the pendulum from one extreme to the other, rather than constantly moving forward. Shaw contended that the history of mankind up to his time had been one of ups and downs because progress had been sought through education. The man of the future must not be taught; he must be bred. In this way, according to Shaw, our race will progress in a straight line forward toward its goal.

"'Fancy,' said he, 'trying to produce a greyhound or a racehorse by education.' . . . This notion of producing superior human beings by the methods of the stud-farm had often been urged, though its difficulties had never been cleared up."¹²

¹¹Shaw, Man, p. 123.

¹²Gilbert Keith Chesterton, George Bernard Shaw (London, 1937), p. 206.

That was Chesterton's comment on the whole notion. But Shaw took all of this seriously. One finds in the Prologue to Caesar and Cleopatra¹³ the god Ra telling the audience:

Ra. And now I leave; for ye are dull folk, and instruction is wasted on you; and I had not spoken so much but that it is in the nature of a god to struggle for ever with the dust and darkness, and to drag from them, by the force of his longing for the divine, more life and more light. Settle ye therefore in your seats and keep silent; for ye are about to hear a man speak, and a great man he was, as ye count greatness.¹⁴

In his later plays Shaw gives a clear conception of where he thought all this progress was going to lead.¹⁵ The Julius Caesars and the Don Juans were steps on the way to the production of the superman. In Caesar, sex, passion, and the burdens of the flesh are reduced to their lowest dimensions. In Far-Fetched Fables one sees the "Disembodied Races," who exist as "ThoughtVortexes." Life has disengaged itself from matter. Only thought remains. No spoken or written communication is necessary, since direct apprehension takes its place.

¹³ Shaw admits that he will confuse scholars in centuries to come by the fact that he wrote a long Prologue for actor Johnston Forbes-Robertson, but which is so lengthy and difficult that it is usually replaced in most productions by the "Alternative to the Prologue." The latter is a scene between soldiers in the palace of Cleopatra, explaining the ensuing action. This thesis will make use of both. See Henderson, p. 751.

¹⁴ Shaw, Caesar, p. 89.

¹⁵ See Back to Methuselah, Far-Fetched Fables, and Buoyant Billions as they are synthesized by A. H. Nethercot, PMLA, LXIX (March 1954), 72-73.

"Finally, temporarily reversing the process, Raphael, a Thought Vortex, embodies himself as a specimen of the process, and Shaw's only realized Superman has at last appeared."¹⁶

Now a word on Karl Marx to complete the picture of Shaw's basic philosophy. The real reason why Marx fascinated Shaw had nothing to do with economics. It was Marx's appeal to "an unnamed, unrecognized passion—a new passion—the passion of hatred in the more generous souls among the respectable and educated sections for the accursed middle-class institutions that had starved, thwarted, misled and corrupted them from their cradles."¹⁷ Das Kapital was to Shaw a concrete expression of the social injustices and wrongs that had for many years impressed him wherever he turned.

On the surface, Ibsen's realism may not seem to have much in common with supermen and "Thought Vortexes." But, as has already been said, Shaw believed that only in breaking away from traditional morality and convention, as Ibsen wished his listeners to do, could the human race ever proceed to the era of the superman which Shaw himself envisioned. Ibsen it was who turned Shaw's thoughts to putting down in play form the ideas about social and world reform which he had tried before to express in pamphlets, tracts, and lectures. Ibsen

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Henderson, p. 218, quotes these words, but gives no reference.

was the first to do just that himself.

Before the turn of the century, the theater had consisted mostly of melodramas and gay, pointless comedies. Shaw himself said at the time, "Nobody goes to the theater except the people who go to Madame Tussaud's."¹⁸ The theater, thought Shaw, had no share in the leadership of thought. Then came Henrik Ibsen with his realistic plays that stirred audiences to serious thinking about serious problems, ranging from topics like the rights of women to syphilis (which had never before been treated on a "respectable" stage).

The controversy may here be omitted as to how much, if at all, Ibsen influenced Shaw in the writing of his plays. Certainly Shaw derived basic notions from Ibsen, like his idea of presenting serious problems on the stage, and of speaking out against conventional mores. But it would seem that Shaw only used Ibsen as a springboard. Indeed, Ibsen is lost sight of even in "The Quintessence of Ibsenism."¹⁹ This is ostensibly an essay of dramatic criticism of Ibsen's works. But Shaw really uses Ibsen as a basis for developing his own theory of drama.

¹⁸ Quoted by Walter Kerr, How Not to Write a Play (New York, 1955), p. 28, but no reference is given.

¹⁹ George Bernard Shaw, "The Quintessence of Ibsenism," The Major Critical Essays (London, 1955). Hereafter the essay will be referred to as the "Quintessence."

Shaw admits at the beginning of the essay that the term realism as applied to Ibsen is not used in the ordinary sense of the term, as applied to a realist like Zola. The same can be said of the term idealist, and others which Shaw uses in the essay. Shaw remarks at the outset:

You and I, reader, will be at ~~cross~~ purposes at every sentence unless you allow me to distinguish pioneers like . . . Ibsen as realists from the idealists. . . . If you ask me why I have not allotted the terms the other way and called /pioneers like_/ Ibsen idealists and the conventionalists realists, I reply that Ibsen himself, though he has not formally made the distinction, has so repeatedly harped on conventions and conventionalists, as ideals and idealists that if I were now to perversely call them realities and realists, I should confuse readers.²⁰

Though Shaw made much of what he has insisted he finds in Ibsen's works at least implicitly, many critics feel that Shaw found more in the works of Ibsen than was actually there at all. So much so, that one perceptive German critic said that the essay should have been entitled "The Quintessence of Shavianism."²¹ Shaw does admit in the passage quoted above that Ibsen never made the distinction formally in his works of realist, idealist, and Philistine. But he protests that he is only giving labels to the type of people Ibsen talks about in his plays. It is in the "Quintessence," then, that Shaw develops the theory of the realist, Philistine, and

²⁰Ibid., p. 29. Shaw seems to have confused things anyway.

²¹Quoted by Henderson, p. 409.

idealist, which was to influence so much of his later work, especially Caesar and Cleopatra.

Using Ibsen as a starting point, Shaw develops his theory of the three types of people who inhabit the earth. The first type consists of idealists. They see life, not as it is, but as they think it should be. They institute laws and customs for the Philistines, the second class, to follow. The Philistines, whose name is drawn from biblical stories, eat, drink, and propagate, but do not worry about ideals and the like. When they complain that life is really not the way the idealists tell them it is, they are told to act as if it were and at least appear to conform to social convention. The idealists comprise 299 out of every 1,000 people, the Philistines 700, and there is but one lone realist in every 1,000 people. The realist faces life as he knows it to be. He acts according to his own innately good motivations and not because of the dictates of any conventional code. The realist alone faces life squarely. Hence the realist will be the one chosen by the Life Force to carry on Man's ascent to higher perfection.²²

As for the one man in a thousand, the lonesome realist, Shaw also perceived an ambiguousness of terminology,

²²Much of the present material has been skillfully set forth by Arthur M. Nethercot, Men and Supermen: The Shavian Portrait Gallery (Cambridge, 1954). Prof. Nethercot is perhaps the best commentator on Shaw's doctrine of realism. Indeed, he is one of the few who treat it at all. This book will be referred to hereafter as Supermen.

because of the contemporary fictional associations of the word. . . . He is the man who has 'risen above the danger and the fear that his acquisitiveness will lead him to murder, and his affections to debauchery.' He is the 'true prophet,' and yet he is denounced and persecuted, not by the 'ignorant and stupid,' but by the 'literate and cultured.' So at length the realist altogether loses patience with ideals, and founds his life on his respect for himself and on 'faith in the validity of his own will.' It is his individualism that triumphs, not his egotism.²³

Shaw laments that from the beginning man could not face the inexorable. Man therefore masked all the threatening facts of life as soon as he discovered them. The king of all terrors, for example, is Death and man could certainly not face that. Now he fixed the mask of personal immortality on the face of Death for this purpose we all know. And man did the same with all the things which he found disagreeable and inevitable. These masks were man's ideals; and what would life be without ideals, man asked himself. Some men were brave enough to want to find out and began tearing off the masks which others could not do without, to look reality in the face.

There are plenty of masks around us still, says Shaw: "Those devised to disguise the brutalities of the sexual instinct, . . . and to soften the rigorous aspect of the iron laws by which Society regulates its gratification."²⁴

²³Ibid., p. 25.

²⁴Ibid.

Another mask is the notion of duty. As Apollodorus quips in Caesar, "When a stupid man is doing something he is ashamed of, he always declares that it is his duty."²⁵ Such would be the case with a woman who spends her whole life tied down to a husband and children when she could be out making a career for herself. She excuses herself on the grounds that it is her duty.

"Our 299 domestic failures are therefore become idealists as to marriage," continues Shaw.²⁶ Shaw defines idealism as the policy of forcing individuals to act on the assumption that all ideals are real, and to recognize and accept such action as standard moral conduct, absolutely valid in all circumstances. Shaw says that, according to the idealists, any conduct contrary to the tenets of idealism should be punished.²⁷

Meanwhile the Philistines enjoy marriage and would never dream of calling it an institution. When the realist comes along and points out that institutions like marriage are a total failure the idealists despise him, but the Philistines

²⁵Shaw, Caesar, p. 142.

²⁶Shaw, "Quintessence," p. 27.

²⁷Ibid.

are not bothered at all. The realists claim that ideals like marriage are "swaddling clothes" which man has outgrown and which impede his progress forward. Ideals numb us and murder self within us. They are something "whereby, instead of resisting death, we can disarm it by committing suicide."²⁸

The idealist thinks that man is by nature evil and that this is all for the better. But the realist, who has come to have a deep respect for himself and the validity of his own will, thinks that this is all for the worse. The realist declares that when a man abnegates his right to live and be free in a world in which he was meant to live and be free, he is dead already but does not know it.

Here, then, is Shaw's doctrine of realism. It is the creed of those who face life as it is and act according to their innately good inclinations and thus perfect themselves and lead the way to the production of a better race. It never seemed to bother Shaw that what he was saying was going against the basic code of civilization in many respects. He was interested in stirring people up against the Victorian formalism that he found all about him. Shaw used the case of marriage as only an example of how his theory worked. Certainly it applies, he thought, to all situations of life. In the Prologue to Caesar and Cleopatra the god Ra sets up a perfect application

²⁸Ibid., p. 31. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are evident here.

of the Shavian doctrine of realism, by presenting to the audience the characters of Pompey the idealist and Caesar the realist.

The gods had tired of Pompey's talk of law and duty and other such matters, Ra explains. They smiled on Caesar who was not always rebuking them for their "indecent ways of creation" and hiding their handiwork as something shameful. "Caesar said, 'Unless I break the law of old Rome, I cannot take my share in ruling her.' . . . But Pompey said, 'The law is above all; and if thou break it thou shalt die.' Then said Caesar, 'I will break it: kill me if you can.' And he broke it."²⁹ And on the field of Pharsalia Pompey the idealist perished before Caesar the realist.

Ra tells his audience that the spirit of idealism which motivated Pompey was passed on to his followers and is still alive in the world today. The god warns those in the audience who take refuge in false ideals, like Pompey did, to heed the lesson they are about to receive from Caesar and Cleopatra.³⁰

After a consideration of this speech of Ra, there is no doubt that Shaw infused his doctrine of realism into the Prologue to Caesar and Cleopatra. But does Shaw's realism permeate the whole play? That is the question to be answered.

²⁹Shaw, Caesar, Prologue, p. 87.

³⁰Ibid., p. 89.

Some would call Caesar the textbook or catechism of Shaw's realism. Other critics would say that Shaw's doctrine of realism is not to be found there or in any other play of his. Shaw, they contend, was a writer of comedy. In short, some speak of the comedy of IDEAS and others of the COMEDY of ideas. An attempt will be made in this thesis to decide which, if either, of these two opinions is valid.

The present writer will explore the characters of Caesar and Cleopatra to see if Caesar is, as some say, Shaw's greatest realist, and to see if Caesar succeeded in making Cleopatra one too. Thus it will be possible to decide, at least in the present instance, whether or not Shaw really used his philosophy in the writing of his play, and whether it is really necessary to understand that philosophy in order to get a full appreciation of the play.

Among the dissenters is Walter Kerr, drama critic of The New York Herald Tribune, who says simply: "I feel it is almost necessary to separate the 'philosophy' from the plays. The plays were written to conform to the philosophy, of course; but they don't. Something happens between the desire and the act. (I've gone into this briefly in 'How Not to Write a Play,' if that's any help to you.)"³¹

In that book Mr. Kerr writes that Shaw behaved with

³¹Personal letter to the author, March 8, 1958; quoted by Mr. Kerr's permission.

perfect integrity. He counseled others to write serious, thought-provoking plays and he tried to do so himself. "His ebullient instincts outran his advice, and—probably without wanting to, possibly without knowing it—he somersaulted into the arena of pure comedy."³² Whatever his extracurricular pronouncements, says Mr. Kerr in Pieces at Eight, "Shaw had never been an Ibsen realist, a Chekhov naturalist, or a manufacturer of salable ideas."³³

Mr. Kerr is by no means alone in this position. When Caesar was first produced, it was called an opéra bouffe, an extravaganza, and a nice libretto for Offenbach to set to music.³⁴ This bothered Shaw not in the least, incidentally.

On one side there are critics, like Louis F. Doyle, who think Shaw's philosophizing is present in his plays to a fault. Shaw's comedy of ideas, he says, turned the stage into a debating rostrum, a lecture platform, everything but the arena of human spirit it once had been.³⁵ Others, like

³²Walter Kerr, How Not to Write a Play (New York, 1955) p. 34.

³³Walter Kerr, Pieces at Eight (New York, 1957), pp. 118-119.

³⁴See Henderson, p. 735. He seems to think these were compliments.

³⁵Louis F. Doyle, "O'Neill Redivivus," America, XCVIII (November 2, 1957), 137.

G. K. Chesterton, think that Shaw "introduced into the theatre the things that no one else had introduced into a theatre-- the things in the street outside."³⁶

Shaw himself would probably say that his plays are philosophical; but philosophical thought in a play does not keep it from being entertaining. He closes the "Quintessence" with the following exhortation:

We want a frankly doctrinal theatre. There is no more reason for making a doctrinal theatre inartistic than for putting a cathedral organ out of tune. . . . I do not suggest that the Ibsen theatre should confine itself to Ibsen any more than the Established Church confines itself to Jeremiah. . . . When we have the sense to promise that our endowed theatre will be an important place, and that it will make people of low tastes and tribal or commercial ideas horribly uncomfortable by its efforts to bring conviction of sin to them, we shall get endowments as easily as the religious people who are not foolishly ashamed to ask for what they want.³⁷

³⁶Chesterton, Shaw, p. 249.

³⁷Shaw, "Quintessence," pp. 149-150.

CHAPTER IV

JULIUS CAESAR: SHAW'S SUPER-REALIST

In his preface to Candida, as John Mason Brown recalls, Shaw described himself as a crow who had followed many plows. "Surely none of these had led him down stranger furrows than his flirtations with the dictator principle. The champion of the super man, who was fascinated by Napoleon and who has had kind words to say about Stalin and even Mussolini, was bound sooner or later to be drawn to Caesar."¹

Critics and actors ever since have been fascinated by Shaw's Caesar.² Both, in their respective fields, have tried to

¹John Mason Brown, Still Seeing Things (New York, 1950), p. 162.

²Shaw has been blessed with excellent casts in recent productions: Gabriel Pascal's motion picture spectacle starred Claude Rains, Vivien Leigh, and Flora Robson as Ftatateeta, and Stewart Granger as Apollodorus. It was released on August 16, 1946. On December 21, 1949 Sir Cedric Hardwicke opened with Lilli Palmer at the National Theater in New York, with Arthur Treacher as Britannus. Sir Laurence Olivier and Vivian Leigh starred in the play at the Ziegfeld Theater, opening December 19, 1951. The play was presented in a "spectacular" production on television on the night of March 4, 1956 with Sir Cedric Hardwicke again portraying Caesar, Claire Bloom as Cleopatra, and Judith Anderson in the role of Ftatateeta, with Cyril Ritchard as Britannus. These comprise some of the leading names of the current American and British stage.

see the many facets of the complex character which Shaw gave his Caesar. Of the now famous production of Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra, which the Oliviers did in 1951 on a double bill with Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, Life commented that Caesar in Shaw's play is a "mouthpiece for Shaw himself." Playing the part in pale make-up and a gray wig, "Sir Laurence Olivier teaches Cleopatra the art of being a queen, stressing Caesar's benevolence and adding a dash of Mr. Chips to the most famous Roman of them all."³ Although some thought that the characterization could have done without the "dash of Mr. Chips," this opinion does point out how diversely the part of Caesar can be interpreted. For who can say whether Shaw's Caesar is history's or Shakespeare's? Many try. It is not the purpose of this thesis to study that problem. But it will be helpful to compare Shaw's Caesar to history's and Shakespeare's in passing, in order that Shaw's own creation may stand out in bolder relief.

Shaw could not seem to make up his mind whether his Caesar was really the one drawn by the nineteenth-century German historian Mommsen or not.⁴ Shaw wrote to Mesketh Pearson in 1918:

³"Loves of Cleopatra: Leigh and Olivier Play Shaw and Shakespeare," Life, December 17, 1951, p. 84.

⁴Shaw was sure, however, of his debt to Carlyle for the idea of a historical character capable of bearing the weight of life realistically, rather than suffering from the passion to die a gallant death. See Brown, Seeing, p. 163.

"I took the chronicle without alteration from Mommsen. I read a lot of other historians, from Plutarch, who hated Caesar, to Warde-Fowler; but I found that Mommsen had conceived Caesar as I wished to present him, and that he told the story of the visit to Egypt like a man who believed in it, which many historians dont. I stuck nearly as closely to him as Shakespear did to Plutarch or Molinshed."⁵

On the other hand, Shaw, who never minded contradicting himself, also said that he had "no thought of pretending to express the Mommsenite view of Caesar any better than Shakespeare expressed a view which was not even Plutarchian."⁶ On other occasions Shaw would contend that his play was historically accurate in almost all respects. For example, he admits to only one anachronism in the whole play: Cleopatra suggest that Caesar use rum to cure his baldness.⁷ And this one Shaw permitted only "for conciseness in a hurried situation."⁸ But Henderson says that Shaw "revels in anachronisms,

⁵See Pearson, Portrait, p. 187. It will be noted that texts of Shaw printed in England always omit the apostrophe in contractions, as in the word dont in this quotation.

⁶Quoted by Gordon W. Couchman, "Here was a Caesar: Shaw's Comedy Today," PMLA, LXXII (March 1957), 274.

⁷Shaw, Caesar, p. 184.

⁸Ibid., "Notes to Caesar and Cleopatra," p. 194. These notes, which Shaw added at the end of the play, will be cited hereafter as "Notes."

and goes so far as to assert that this is the only way to make the historic past take form and life before our eyes."⁹ Henderson thinks that Shaw should be allowed a steam engine at work in Alexandria in 48 B.C., if Shakespeare can put a billiard table in Cleopatra's palace a few years later.

But the present writer is not chiefly concerned with Shaw's departures from history in the case of rum and steam engines. His chief concern in this thesis is with Shaw's more important liberties with historical fact. Shaw may say that he simply took what Mommsen said and put it on the stage as it is said to have happened. He may protest that the audience is seeing but a chapter of Mommsen furnished with scenery and dialogue. He may even cite an elaborate list of authorities in the program to the first production (the copyright performance).¹⁰ But in the end he must admit, "Many of these authorities have consulted their imagination, more or less. The author has done the same."¹¹

Gordon Couchman has made a thorough study of the historical implications of Shaw's play.¹² He points out many places where

⁹ See Henderson, pp. 558-559.

¹⁰ This program is reproduced in full in Henderson, pp. 554-555.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 553.

¹² Couchman, 272-285.

Shaw does not agree with the sources, even with his primary source, Mommsen. For example, Shaw utilizes Mommsen's words that Caesar was upset because Pompey had been assassinated: "With deep agitation he [Caesar] turned away, when the murderer brought to his ship the head of the man, who had been his son-in-law and for long years his colleague in rule, and to get whom alive into his power he had come to Egypt."¹³

But Shaw conveniently ignores what follows: "The dagger of the rash assassin precluded an answer to the question, how Caesar would have dealt with the captive Pompeius; but, while the humane sympathy, which still found a place in the great soul of Caesar side by side with ambition, enjoined that he should spare his former friend, his interest also required that he should annihilate Pompeius otherwise than by the executioner."¹⁴ Caesar would have had to dispose of Pompey somehow himself, and no doubt would have done so, as Couchman points out. But, as if to make amends for such sins of omission, Shaw has Caesar say to the assassin of Pompey, "Why should the slayer of Ver-
cingetorix rebuke the slayer of Pompey?"¹⁵ But this does not

¹³Theodore Mommsen, History of Rome, trans. William P. Dickson (London, 1875), IV, 425.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Shaw, Caesar, p. 123.

cancel the eloquent words of Caesar which preceded this: "Am I Julius Caesar or am I a wolf, that you fling to me the grey head of the old soldier, the laurelled conqueror?"¹⁶

The Cambridge Ancient History sums up the historical situation: "A man of Caesar's generosity could not but be moved by the death of Pompey at the hands of renegades and aliens. But his sympathy, great as it was, must have been tempered by relief. . . . Pompey stood too high even for Caesar's clemency, and his death, by his own hand or another's, was necessary."¹⁷

There are other instances in the play where Shaw has departed from historical fact. But it suffices here to note Couchman's conclusions on this point: there are several episodes where history, even in Mommsen's glorified portraiture, seems to show a Caesar not above looking to his own interests and where Shaw has been unable to resist idealizing his hero. "As we should expect, then, where Cleopatra is concerned, his Caesar, like Browning's Duke, though for more benevolent reasons, chooses never to stoop."¹⁸ Shaw, in short,

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷F. E. Adcock, "The Civil War," The Cambridge Ancient History, eds. S. A. Cook, F. E. Adcock, M. P. Charlesworth (Cambridge, 1951), IX, 669.

¹⁸Couchman, 280. Shaw completely passes over Caesar's love affair with Cleopatra for reasons which will be treated in the next chapter. But it is an established historical fact. See The Cambridge Ancient History, IX, 670-674.

was content to produce a historically one-sided play as long as it was delightful and entertaining. He wished, furthermore, to attack the romantic convention of the Shakespearian school, and to humanize Caesar.¹⁹

But it would seem to this writer that perhaps Shaw turned to Mommsen, who is known for his glorified picture of Caesar, in order to produce a portrait of Caesar that would resemble his own concept of the superman. Certainly Mommsen's Caesar is something of a superman. Shaw even left out the few touches of ordinary humanity which Mommsen allows to Caesar. Perhaps Shaw wanted to fashion in his Caesar a realist and a superman, which one might call a "super-realist."

Ervin says that this is the reason why Shaw departed both from history's and Shakespeare's Caesar. He says, "Caesar is a stuffed shirt in Shakespeare's tragedy. . . . Shakespeare's Caesar might have been a successful importer of bananas: Shaw's is a genius whose every speech has the sound of genius."²⁰ Ervin believes that it is immaterial whether Shaw's emperor was the Caesar of history or not.

¹⁹ See above, pp. 6-8, where Silverman's treatment of this point is discussed.

²⁰ St. John Ervin, Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work, and Friends (London, 1956), p. 334.

What does matter is that the Caesar of this remarkable play is Shaw's conception of a great man. Having seen and read Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, G. B. S. felt profoundly dissatisfied with the portrait he found there, and decided to make another Caesar in his own image. He drew the picture of a genius as he conceived a genius to be, and for the purpose of convenience, called it Julius Caesar. But it could as justly have been called a portrait of Robert E. Lee. We shall fail in understanding if we do not perceive the fact that in this play we have G. B. S.'s conception of greatness rather than a faithful portrait of an historical character.²¹

Certainly, if one replaces Ervine's word genius with the word super-realist, his words take on new meaning. In any case, Shaw pronounced Shakespeare's Caesar "an admitted failure." "Shakespear," says Shaw, "who knew human weakness so well, never knew human strength of the Caesarian type. . . . It cost Shakespear no pang to write Caesar down for the merely technical purpose of writing Brutus up."²² Then comes the statement which shocked generations of what Shaw once called "bardolaters:" "It will be said that these remarks can bear no other construction than an offer of my Caesar to the public as an improvement on Shakespear's. And in fact, that is their precise purport."²³

John Mason Brown agrees with Shaw's statement, and says that few would deny that Shaw succeeded where Shakespeare had failed.²⁴ Other critics likewise have been liberal in their

²¹Ibid.

²²Shaw, "Better?" p. xxix.

²³Ibid., pp. xxix-xxx.

²⁴Brown, Seeing, p. 162.

superlatives about Shaw's Caesar. Gassner calls Caesar "a brilliant portrait of a whole man and genius,"²⁵ and Chesterton calls him "a fine sculptured reality."²⁶ Chesterton adds that "Caesar is really the only great man of history to whom the Shaw theories apply."²⁷

This last statement certainly supports the theory that Shaw fashioned his Caesar according to his philosophy of realism. Whether Chesterton ever read Mommsen or not is not certain; but some passages in Mommsen bear out Chesterton's remark so well that one is tempted to believe that Mommsen modeled his Caesar on Shaw's, rather than the other way round. Mommsen sums up his treatment of Caesar in this way:

If in a nature so harmoniously organized there is any one trait to be singled out as characteristic, it is this—that he stood aloof from all ideology and everything fanciful. . . . Caesar was thoroughly a realist and a man of sense; and whatever he undertook and achieved was penetrated and guided by his . . . genius. . . . A thorough realist, he never allowed the images of the past or venerable tradition to disturb him; with him nothing was of value in politics but the living present and the law of reason.²⁸

²⁵Gassner, Treasury, p. 539.

²⁶Chesterton, Shaw, p. 150.

²⁷Ibid., p. 147.

²⁸Mommsen, IV, 451-455.

It is plausible that Shaw thought of Ibsen's "Be thyself!" when he was reading passages like these in Mommsen. Perhaps such sentences in Mommsen were the father of Shaw's wish to exhibit a man, "not as mortifying his nature by doing his duty, . . . but as simply doing what he naturally wants to do."²⁹

It is difficult to interpret Shaw's remarks about Caesar in his Preface and Notes without recourse to his doctrine of realism. Shaw attributes complete originality to his Caesar. Originality gives man an air of frankness and generosity by enabling him to estimate the value of truth or success in a particular case, completely independent of convention and moral generalization. Shaw goes on to say that Caesar is such a man, that he will therefore not tell a lie which everyone expects him to tell. "His lies are not found out: they pass for candors."³⁰ He knows that the real moment of success is not the one apparent to the crowd. He gives money away when he can get most for it. "Hence, in order to produce an impression of complete disinterestedness and magnanimity, he has only to act with entire selfishness; and this perhaps is the only sense in which a man can be said to be naturally

²⁹

Shaw, "Notes," p. 203.

³⁰Ibid., p. 201.

great."³¹ Therefore, when Rufio blusters that Caesar's clemency has gotten the better of him because he has released all the Egyptian prisoners, Caesar reminds him, "Every Egyptian we imprison means imprisoning two Roman soldiers to guard him." Rufio rightly answers, "I might have known there was some fox's trick behind your fine talking."³²

Nethercot calls Caesar a "thorough-going" realist.³³ When Apollodorus, the aesthete, tells Caesar that Rome will produce no great art but buy up and take up what other nations produce, Caesar answers:

Caesar. Is peace not an art? Is war not an art? Is government not an art? Is civilization not an art? All these we give you in exchange for a few ornaments. You will have the best of the bargain.³⁴

Nethercot fittingly concludes, "And the realist, not the artist, has the last word."³⁵

Time's analysis of the play and Caesar's character in it is very thought-provoking: "Caesar underscores the impotence of wisdom."³⁶ The Time reviewer describes Shaw's Caesar as

³¹ Ibid., p. 203.

³² Shaw, Caesar, p. 133.

³³ Nethercot, Superman, p. 269.

³⁴ Shaw, Caesar, p. 190.

³⁵ Nethercot, Supermen, p. 147.

³⁶ "The Egyptian," Time, LVIII (December 31, 1951), 44.

a Roman eagle, bald, and wearing a laurel wreath as a toupee.³⁷ Be that as it may, Caesar is above wearing a laurel wreath for show only. Caesar tells Rufio, his right-hand officer, "I am an old man. . . . Well, every dog has his day; and I have had mine."³⁸ Later Caesar muses, "Pompey's head has fallen; and Caesar's head is ripe."³⁹

Shaw's Caesar, according to Time, differs from Caesarism: "Caesar is no Caesarian," says Caesar, "Were Rome a true republic, then were Caesar the first Republican."⁴⁰ This Caesar's philosophy is one of "Right Needs Might"; but it is not, therefore, a pretext for dictatorship. "Shaw's Caesar, if not history's, has no other course for checking the violence, the will-to-rule, the lust-to-kill of everybody—the young Cleopatra not least—he encounters. Indeed, the exultantly up-raised swords and hysterical shouts of 'Hail Caesar' at the final curtain are less Caesar's moment of triumph than of defeat. The voice of reason is always drowned out, all too soon will 'Ave, Caesar' become 'Et tu, Brute.'⁴¹

Shaw thought that the voice of the realist would be hooted

³⁷ See Shaw, Caesar, p. 134, for the scene referred to.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

⁴¹ "The Egyptian," p. 44.

down by the idealists, especially since the number of realists is so small. Several times in Caesar and Cleopatra Caesar vents his rage when he realizes again and again "the impotence of wisdom." When Cleopatra has Pothinus, the people's favorite, killed, the mob clamors at the front gate of the palace for revenge. Caesar reprimands Cleopatra for not showing clemency to Pothinus as Caesar himself had advised.

Caesar. Was it my folly, as you deem it, or your wisdom? In this Egyptian Red Sea of Blood, whose hand has held all your heads above the waves? [Turning to Cleopatra] And yet, when Caesar says to such a one, 'Friend, go free,' you, clinging for your little life to my sword, dare steal out and stab him in the back? . . . By the gods, I am tempted to open my hand and let you all sink into the flood.⁴²

Here, too, is the voice not only of the realist, but also of the superman. These two characteristics Shaw mingles in his Caesar throughout the play, making him an admirable character. Caesar is not merely the conquering soldier, but also the creative poet-artist, as Apollodorus calls him. He is the man of destiny, as he himself says in his first speech, a prayer to the great sphinx: "I am he of whose genius you are the symbol: part brute, part woman, and part god—nothing in me of man at all."⁴³ Caesar says that he has found men and cities in his travels and conquests, "but no other Caesar.

⁴²Shaw, Caesar, p. 182.

⁴³Ibid., p. 102.

. . . Sphinx, you and I, strangers to the race of men, are no strangers to each other. . . . Rome is a madman's dream: this is my Reality."⁴⁴

This seeming egoism is contrasted with genuine self-criticism, stripped of all illusion. In one of the most oft-repeated lines from the play, Caesar reflects, "One year is like another, except that I grow older, whilst the crowd in the Appian Way is always the same age."⁴⁵ But always Caesar is superior to the common race of men.

He is a man of decision, a maker of his environment, and not the victim of it. Shaw always believed that man's increased command of nature was not worth much if it were not accompanied by an increase of command over himself. Caesar has this command. He stands out in sharp contrast to the mean-minded rabble, the soldiers, and petty statesmen with whom he must deal. This is the type of man whom Shaw envisioned would be responsible for the development of man into a higher being.

Shaw's Caesar does not "bestride the earth like a Colossus," as does Shakespeare's. As Chesterton puts it, he rather walks on earth, but lightly touches our planet with a stern levity, spurning it like a stone. "He walks like a winged man who

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 101.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 174.

has chosen to fold his wings."⁴⁶

Chesterton says that Shaw's Caesar reflects the common Calvinistic notion that one does not get virtue, one has it. According to this theory, Jack the Giant Killer did not conquer because of a magic sword, but because he was superior. So it is with Caesar. Caesar has virtue, and therefore has no need of goodness.⁴⁷ Shaw, of course, would define virtue as living according to one's nature.

Caesar's virtues are catalogued by Shaw in his commentary on the play which usually follows the text of Caesar. Caesar is not forgiving, for a man who does not resent, cannot forgive. Caesar is not frank, because he says things which others are afraid to say, and therefore has no need of frankness. He is not generous, for he gives things he does not want, to people he intends to use. Such are the paradoxes with which Shaw draws his hero. To the ordinary person this sort of thing sounds perverse, if he understands what Shaw means by these phrases at all. Yet, how else is one to explain Caesar's actions in the play?

When Caesar is presented with a bundle containing the

⁴⁶Chesterton, p. 152.

⁴⁷Cf. Shaw, "Notes," p. 202.

names of those who have conspired against him, he is asked where he wants them put. He replies quietly:

Caesar. In the fire. Would you have me waste the next three years of my life in proscribing and condemning men who will be my friends when I have proved that my friendship is worth more than Pompey's was—than Cato's is. . . . Am I a bulldog, to seek quarrels merely to shew how stubborn my jaws are? . . . I do not make human sacrifices to my honor.⁴⁸

Later, when Pothinus tells Caesar that Cleopatra has been plotting to get Caesar to leave Egypt so that she might rule in his place, Caesar replies that he is not surprised. It is very natural. He resents it no more than he resents the wind when it chills him, or the night whose darkness makes him stumble.⁴⁹

When an old scholar, Theodotus, begs Caesar to put out the fire which has started in the Alexandrian library, he declines to do so. Although he is an author himself, he says that it is better that the Egyptians should learn to live their lives rather than dream them away with the help of books. "What is burning is the memory of mankind," protests Theodotus. "A shameful memory," answers Caesar, "Let it burn." "Will you destroy the past?" "Ay, and build the future with its ruins." Why, asks Caesar, should he worry about a few sheepskins

⁴⁸ Shaw, Caesar, p. 150.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 171.

scrawled with errors, when Theodotus cared not a whit for the head of Pompey.⁵⁰ While Caesar is speaking in these glowing terms he really knows that the fire is distracting the Egyptians, so that he and his party can escape to the lighthouse. That is his real reason for letting the library burn.

What is perhaps Caesar's greatest speech, the one which was referred to earlier in passing, gives Caesar's fine sentiments on the subject of revenge. Ftatateeta murders Pothinus at the behest of Cleopatra. Caesar bitterly accuses Cleopatra of having renounced him.

Caesar. If one man in all the world can be found, now or forever, to know that you did wrong, that man will have either to conquer the world as I have, or be crucified by it. . . . These knockers at your gate are also believers in vengeance and in stabbing. You have slain their leader; it is right that they should slay you. . . . Then in the name of that right . . . shall I not slay them for murdering their Queen, and be slain in my turn by their countrymen as the invader of their fatherland? Can Rome do less than slay these slayers, too, to shew the world how Rome avenges her sons and her honor. And so, to the end of history, murder shall breed murder, always in the name of right and honor and peace, until the gods grow tired of blood and create a race that can understand.⁵¹

In the following act, however, Cleopatra reproaches Caesar with the fact that Rufio, his own right-hand man, has killed Ftatateeta. The audience is no doubt taken aback when Caesar heartily commends the deed, on the grounds that Rufio

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 132.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 192.

dispensed with all legal forms.⁵² He did not set himself up as judge, nor appeal to justice or the gods. It was a natural slaying, done without malice. This would seem to be Shaw talking, rather than Caesar.

Cleopatra does not understand what Caesar means in this speech and is very bewildered by it. Several times throughout the play Caesar's pupil does not seem to understand Caesar, as we shall presently see in the following chapter. The musing, middle-aged Caesar keeps Cleopatra his dotting pupil in queenship but will not risk his heart. He is too wise for that, though the Persian in the Alternate Prologue says that "Caesar grows old now; he is past fifty and full of labors and battles. He is too old for the young women; and the old women are too wise to worship him."⁵³

Cleopatra is not the only one who fails to understand Caesar. Many who see and read the play have difficulty in understanding his many-sided character and glib speeches, just as many people find it difficult to understand Shaw. Indeed, Caesar is probably the only person in the play who could have a meeting of minds with Shaw. Caesar is similar to the playwright in many ways, and these similarities have led some to call Caesar a self-portrait of Shaw. Caesar and

⁵²Ibid., p. 192.

⁵³Ibid., p. 96.

Shaw were both a trifle vain and rhetorical, but still men of business. Both were ageless, boyish, exuberant and humorous.⁵⁴

Cleopatra does seem to have some insight into Caesar's greatness at the end of the play when she speaks of the way in which a true ruler should govern: "Without punishment. Without revenge. Without judgment."⁵⁵ As Nethercot observes, "Only a superman could consistently live up to such a standard."⁵⁶ And only Shaw's Caesar actually does.

⁵⁴Henderson, pp. 556-557, enlarges on this comparison.

⁵⁵Shaw, Caesar, p. 191.

⁵⁶Nethercot, Supermen, p. 271.

CHAPTER V

CLEOPATRA: THE WOULD-BE REALIST

"Do ye crave the story of an unchaste woman? Hath the name of Cleopatra tempted ye hither? Ye foolish ones; Cleopatra is as yet but a child that is whipped by her nurse."¹ Thus the god Ra sets us straight right at the beginning of the play that we are going to see a play about a "kitten on the sphinx," and not the "serpent of the Nile." According to the program for the Olivier production, Cleopatra was really twenty-two when Caesar came to Egypt, although Shaw makes her sixteen.²

Shaw wishes to tell the story of how Caesar tried to teach this girl to be the Queen of Egypt in more than name. In this sense Caesar and Cleopatra could be called a prologue to Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, although Shaw would probably have said that Shakespeare wrote an epilogue to his play. John Mason Brown remarks that, although the two plays

¹Shaw, Caesar, p. 89.

²"Caesar and Cleopatra," The Playbill for the Ziegfeld Theater, February 11, 1952, p. 15.

are as different as an emotionalist who ate roast beef and a rational vegetarian could make them, they fit together like installments in a serial. "Where the one Cleopatra is a kitten growing up to be a queen, the other is a tigress so much the slave of her emotions that she almost has forgotten her duties as a queen."³ Shakespeare's Cleopatra comes to grief because she does not heed the lessons which Shaw's Caesar taught her.

Shaw dismissed Shakespeare's Cleopatra as a Circe who turned hogs into heroes. He disliked her as a tawdry wanton who had made a world leader a strumpet's fool. Shaw said that the public houses of London are full of Antonys and Cleopatras who would be very pleased to be transformed by some idyllic poet into immortal lovers.⁴

"Besides, I have a technical objection to making sexual infatuation a tragic theme. Experience proves that it is only effective in the comic spirit. . . . But to ask us to subject our souls to its ruinous glamor, to worship it, deify it, and imply that it alone makes life worth living, is nothing but felly gone mad erotically."⁵ Shaw leaves little doubt why he departed from the usual notion of Cleopatra to

³John Mason Brown, As They Appear (New York, 1952), p. 81.

⁴Shaw, "Better?" p. xxviii.

⁵Ibid., p. xxix.

present her as a still innocent girl. Perhaps, as Brown implies, he also wished Caesar to be seen through the irreverent eyes of a child.⁶ In fact, Enobarbus in Shakespeare's play anticipates Shaw's attitude toward Cleopatra. This is a sanity, says Brown, born not of disenchantment, but of having the courage, so often mistaken for perversity of wit, to see and describe things as they are. Cleopatra herself seems to have a glimpse of this when she says in Shakespeare's play, "Though age from folly could not give me freedom, / It does from childishness."⁷ It is not hard to imagine Shaw's girl growing up into Shakespeare's Queen. Enobarbus tells us:

the difference between wisdom and folly is a matter of years.⁹

But even without the admonition of Ra in the Prologue to Caesar, there is sufficient, if more subtle, indication of how Shaw is to portray his Cleopatra in the Alternate Prologue, the one which is usually performed. Belzanor, a husky veteran, says that they must carry off the queen when the Romans arrive. Another soldier thinks that they should wait upon the queen's command.

Belzanor. Command! a girl of sixteen? Not we. At Memphis ye deem her a Queen; here we know better. I will take her on the crupper of my horse. When we soldiers have carried her out of Caesar's reach, then the priests and the nurses and the rest of them can pretend she is a queen again, and put their commands into her mouth.¹⁰

When Cleopatra eventually appears between the paws of her "baby sphinx," she gives every indication of fitting the description which Belzanor has given of her. If characters like Theodotus and Britannus in Caesar could be styled as idealists in the Shavian sense, Cleopatra seems to best fit into the class of the Philistines. She is not worried, at her age, about queenly duties, though she asserts to Caesar that she is the Queen of Egypt. She merely wants to kill her brother Ptolemy, even as he would kill her if he had the chance, and live in the palace at Alexandria. There she

⁹ Shaw, "Notes," p. 198.

¹⁰ Shaw, Caesar, p. 95.

could do just as she liked: poison slaves and watch them wriggle, and pretend to Ftataetea that she was going to be put into the fiery furnace.

She tells Caesar that she loves men with round, strong arms; but she is afraid of them. She jabs Caesar repeatedly in the arm with a pin from her hair to convince him that he is not dreaming that he has met her at the sphinx. Then she begins to whimper and cry when Caesar scolds her for her presumption. All of these are characteristics of the Philistine as outlined in the second chapter of the present thesis.¹¹

Caesar tells Cleopatra that a queen does not cry. With that statement Caesar begins to realize the job that lies ahead of him—that of turning this whimpering little Philistine into a woman, a realist, and a queen.

"Shall I teach you a way to prevent Caesar from eating you?" inquires Caesar. Cleopatra clings to him piteously, promising to steal Ftataetea's jewels for him if he will do so. "Caesar never eats women," continues Caesar, "but he eats girls and cats. Now you are a silly girl; and you are descended from the black kitten. You are both a girl and a cat." Caesar will eat her, he warns her, unless she can make him believe that she is a woman.

¹¹See above, pp. 23-26. It is to be carefully noted that during this entire scene Cleopatra does not know that she is talking to Caesar himself. She thinks him to be simply a kind gentleman.

"Oh," exclaims Cleopatra, "you must get a sorcerer to make a woman of me."¹² Caesar also thinks, maybe, that it is going to take more than ordinary wit, patience, and wisdom to make her a woman. It will take a very long time, he tells her. The time to begin Cleopatra's apprenticeship is right now:

Caesar. This very night you must stand face to face with Caesar in the palace of your fathers. . . . Whatever dread may be in your soul—however terrible Caesar may be to you—you must confront him as a brave woman and a great queen; and you must feel no fear. If your hand shakes; if your voice quavers; then—night and death!¹³

Cleopatra tells Caesar, as the terrible notes of the Roman war trumpet sound ever nearer and nearer across the desert, that she will do anything he says. And with that, the making of a realist begins. Cleopatra starts off toward her palace with the man whom she still does not know to be Julius Caesar. To her he is only the old gentleman she has met at the sphinx.

When they arrive at the palace, Caesar commands the queen to have all the lamps lit. Ptarmachus is displeased that this has been done without her permission. Caesar tells Cleopatra to send her away. Cleopatra timidly obliges. "You are not commanding her to go away: you are begging her. You are not a Queen. You will be eaten. Farewell," admonishes Caesar.¹⁴ With that, when Cleopatra begs him to stay, he quietly asks

¹²For this series of speeches, see ibid., pp. 105-106.

¹³Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 108.

the nearest slave if his blade is sharp enough to decapitate Ftatateeta. The nurse realizes that her days of domination are over and kneels to the queen. Lesson one is completed.

In a beautiful piece of Shavian irony, Cleopatra jumps onto the step of the throne, grabs a scourge and begins to beat every slave in sight, shouting exultantly, "I am a real Queen at last—a real, real Queen! Cleopatra the Queen!"¹⁵ Caesar shakes his head dubiously, as she throws her arms around him, shouting, "Oh, I love you for making me a Queen." She says haughtily, "Caesar will know that I am a Queen when he sees my crown and robes, will he not?"

Caesar will not allow Cleopatra to hide behind a mask by pretending outwardly a dignity she does not feel. "No," he answers, "How shall he know that you are not a slave dressed up in the Queen's ornaments?" "You must tell him," Cleopatra replies. Caesar says pointedly, "He will not ask me. He will know Cleopatra by her pride, her courage, her majesty, her beauty."¹⁶

Here Shaw seems to be following Ibsen strictly in repudiating the idealist's cowardly desire to hide from reality and to pretend to live in a dream world. In having

¹⁵Ibid., p. 109.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 110.

Caesar scold Cleopatra for wanting to hide from herself as she really is, Shaw seems to have in mind the Victorian mores of his contemporary society, where appearances meant everything.

Cleopatra, who does not know that she has been with the Julius Caesar she fears to meet all the time, trembles at the approach of Caesar's legions. When the soldiers enter and raise their swords to shout "Hail Caesar!" to the man sitting next to her, she falls into his arms with a great sob of relief. The end of lesson two.

As the play progresses, Cleopatra tries hard to act in accordance with her dignity. But she has frequent relapses into her childish ways. When Cleopatra drags her ten-year-old brother, Ptolemy, from the throne and sits down in his place, Caesar comforts the boy. Furiously jealous, she snaps at Ptolemy, "Take your throne: I don't want it." Caesar says, "Go, Ptolemy. Always take a throne when it is offered to you."¹⁷

But already there are a few stirrings of maturity in her. Caesar tells her he will eat her if she interrupts him again. "I am not afraid. A queen must not be afraid," she answers him, "Eat my husband there, if you like: he is afraid." She refers to Ptolemy. They were born king and consort even as they were born brother and sister. Cleopatra

¹⁷For this scene, see ibid., pp. 117-121.

is rent by the desire to stick her tongue out at her brother and the desire to preserve her newly acquired dignity. But Caesar is determined: "I shall not go away until you are Queen."¹⁸

It is interesting to study the relationship between the teacher and the pupil. He is indulgent when she tells him that he is sentimental and that he could learn a few things about governing from her. "Cleopatra," he replies, "I really think I must eat you after all. . . . You have been growing up since the sphinx introduced us the other night; and you think you know more than I do already." "No," she answers, "that would be very silly of me."¹⁹ Both realize that the young queen is making progress.

Although Caesar is constantly encouraging her to queenliness in public, when caught off guard he always admits that she is just a child at heart. She sends him a rug as a present while he is engaged in combat with the Egyptians at the lighthouse. Rufio fumes, "Have we time to waste on this trumpery? The Queen is only a child." "Just so," says Caesar, "that is why we must not disappoint her."²⁰ When the rug is unrolled and Cleopatra is found inside, she is

¹⁸Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 126.

²⁰Ibid., p. 152.

frightened at the nearness of battle. "Nobody cares for me," she whimpers. "My poor child: your life matters little here to anyone but yourself," says Caesar.²¹ The lighthouse must be abandoned. All jump into the sea to swim to safety, but Cleopatra is afraid to do so. Caesar has her thrown in and helps her swim to shore. Later she reflects that she came to shore with much conceit washed out of her.²²

Cleopatra must be played by an actress with great skill. As has just been seen, the transformation in her demeanor is gradual, changing from scene to scene, act to act. Vivian Leigh is thought by many to have accomplished this acting feat in the present day better than any other actress. The present writer, who was privileged to see her do the role both on the stage and the screen, is much inclined to agree.²³

In fact, Caesar and Cleopatra, in the opinion of many, is one of the few plays of Shaw where there is any character development at all. In most of Shaw's plays, the characters are static: the same at the end as they were at the beginning. But in the case of Cleopatra, does her character really change, or is it just a question of her acquiring a certain veneer of maturity, while remaining a childish Philistine at

²¹Ibid., p. 155.

²²Ibid., p. 162.

²³Cf. "The Egyptian," p. 44.

heart?

There are those who think that Cleopatra really develops into a queenly woman by the end of Shaw's play. She has developed into the woman who will conquer Antony. Certainly Cleopatra has grown more seductive, even though she still fails to interest Caesar, her tutor. As the Persian remarks even at the beginning of the play, "Cleopatra is not yet a woman: neither is she wise. Yet she already troubles men's wisdom."²⁴ But has she become, at the end of the play, more of what Shaw calls a realist, or does she remain underneath it all what Shaw calls a "womanly woman?"

It is interesting to note, in passing, Katherine Cornell's idea about the character of Cleopatra in Antony, which she successfully played in 1947. "Cleopatra was a cultured woman who spoke eight or nine languages and ruled a great country. She was a queen, with the dignity of a queen. But when I played her that way, there were objections."²⁵

Shaw's Cleopatra does not seem to be dignified and cultured throughout the play, nor is she nearing it by the end of the play. This is evident from her childish behavior with regard to Ptolemy, her brother, the lighthouse incident,

²⁴ Shaw, Caesar, p. 95.

²⁵ Quoted by Dorothy and Joseph Samachsen, Let's Meet the Theater (New York, 1954), p. 131.

and the way she comes solemnly sweeping down to the harbor dressed in black for Caesar's departure and then bursts into laughter when Caesar once again mispronounces Ftatateeta's name. Cleopatra, even at the end of the play, is one of Shaw's "womanly women": the typical woman who has not liberated herself from the conventional notion that it is her duty to gratify the male. As Shaw says in the "Quintessence," the womanly woman's seductiveness, her fits of emotion and passion, her tricks, her lies and intrigues are part of the pattern which has been built up by society, that refuses to allow her to be a free individual in a state of free and equal people.²⁶ Does this describe Shaw's Cleopatra?

"That sensuous, cruel, and charming minx, Cleopatra, in Caesar and Cleopatra, develops in the space of a few months from an uncertain, vacillating child to be a fascinating, ruthless queen, but it is her womanliness that marks her more than her queenliness."²⁷ It has already been pointed out that Cleopatra shows cruelty to her slaves, ambition to do what she wants when she is old enough, a fear but also a love of strong men. These characterize the earlier part of her mutation. Caesar realizes that the only way to control her is by her thirst for power.

²⁶Nethercot, Supermen, p. 75, briefly summarizes Shaw's opinion.

²⁷Ibid., p. 81.

After the lighthouse incident she becomes at least externally more mature. Now she thinks only of Caesar and how she can imitate him. Even Ftatateeta calls her a "New Woman."²⁸ That is a beautiful piece of anachronism on Shaw's part. The term refers to Ibsen's heroines—like Hedda Gabler, and Nera in A Doll's House—who try to break away from the ordinary lot of woman and assert themselves as individuals.

Cleopatra begins to speak in Caesarian epigrams. She tells Pothinus:

Cleopatra. Now that Caesar has made me wise, it is no use my liking or disliking: I do what must be done, and have no time to attend to myself. That is not happiness; but it is greatness. If Caesar were gone, I think I could govern the Egyptians; for what Caesar is to me, I am to the fools around me.²⁹

But these are just sayings which she has picked up from Caesar, as Rufio tells her bluntly later. Still, she does have some insight into Caesar. She tells Pothinus that Caesar does not love her any differently from the way in which he loves dogs and children. To the ordinary person, the term love, says Cleopatra, refers to all those whom we do not hate. The rest are strangers and enemies. But Caesar has no hate in him. Hence he is kind to all. He does no more for her than he does for his slaves, or his horse. "His kindness

²⁸Shaw, Caesar, p. 163.

²⁹Ibid., p. 163.

is not for anything in me: it is his own nature."³⁰

Cleopatra admits that she cannot love a god such as Caesar. Perhaps this is her "womanliness" coming out. She loves not a god, but a man, one who can love and hate, who can hurt her, and whom she can hurt in return. Cleopatra is looking for a passionate lover, not a kind, fatherly one like Caesar. In this she seems to manifest the qualities of what Shaw calls a Philistine.³¹ Her vengeful character is the same all through the play. When Pothinus insults her before Caesar and tells him that she is waiting for him to leave so that she can rule alone, she vehemently denies the charge, even though Caesar is not the least bit upset but thinks it only "natural." She has Ftatateeta slay Pothinus. She denies having done so until Caesar presses her to admit it. Then it is that she tries every one of the fits of passion, emotions, lies, tricks, and seductive charms which Shaw says are the tools of the womanly woman.

After having savagely embraced and kissed Ftatateeta earlier for having done the deed, she becomes sheepish with Caesar. "You are wrong to treat me like this," she sobs, "I am only a child." Shaw says, "She purposely breaks down and weeps. . . . She looks up to see what effect she is producing.

³⁰Ibid., p. 164.

³¹See above, pp. 18-21, for the full explanation of what Shaw means by a realist, idealist, and Philistine.

Seeing that he is unmoved, she sits up, pretending to struggle with her emotion to put it bravely away."³²

Then she tries the direct, violent approach: "He was slain by order of the Queen of Egypt. I am not Julius Caesar the dreamer, who allows every slave to insult him." But when Caesar repudiates her action and leaves her alone she again becomes the little girl: "Ftataeteeta. Ftataeteeta. It is dark; and I am alone. Come to me."³³

Finally, when Caesar is leaving for Rome, she comes decked out as for an ordinary man. The wiles and instincts of the woman are much like those of the girl. She is "cunningly" dressed in black and tries to be stern, but breaks out into a laugh. "It is so ridiculous to hear you call her Totateeta," she tells Caesar.³⁴

Caesar answers, "What! As much a child as ever, Cleopatra! Have I not made a woman of you after all?"³⁵ Nethercot says that Caesar should have said, "Have I not made an adult of you?" For Cleopatra is a woman through and through, i.e., a womanly woman.³⁶

³²Shaw, Caesar, p. 179.

³³Ibid., p. 180.

³⁴Ibid., p. 192.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Nethercot, Supermen, p. 83.

Cleopatra does not appear to have profited much by the lessons in queenship which Caesar has tried to impart to her. While it is true that she has cultivated a certain exterior maturity, deep inside she is still passionate, childish, stubborn, and full of deceit. These qualities rank her with the Philistines, in that she desires only to please herself and does not care about anyone or anything else.

Shaw leaves his Cleopatra on the seashore, waving goodbye to Caesar and his wisdom, and waiting eagerly with "palpitating heart" for the coming of her strong Roman with the round arms. She is a Philistine to the last.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: SHAW AS PLAYWRIGHT AND PHILOSOPHER

Now that a closer consideration has been made of Caesar and Cleopatra, one can better compare the two principal characters and draw some conclusions as to whether Shaw really carried his philosophy of realism into the play or not.

It is clear that the young Cleopatra seems to become a mature Philistine, but for all of that, she remains a Philistine.¹ "Nobody cares for me," cries the selfish girl.² That line perhaps epitomizes her character. There is none of the self-realization and individualism in Cleopatra that one finds in the realist Caesar. It is interesting to watch the two characters when they are together, and compare their reactions to what happens in the play. One sees two opposite streams of values and thought running side by side. Cleopatra asks Caesar dreamily about Antony, "Do his strong round arms shine in the sun like marble?" "He is in excellent condition—considering how much he eats and drinks," replies Caesar. "Oh, you must not say common, earthly things about

¹See Nethercote, Supermen, pp. 82-83.

²Shaw, Caesar, p. 155.

him; for I love him."³

Caesar tells her to leave him alone, for he must get to work and plan his strategy for battle, so that he can conclude the war and return to Rome. But Cleopatra says she does not want him to leave and return to Rome. "But you want Mark Antony to come from it," Caesar says, knowing how to handle her. "Oh yes, yes, yes: I forget. Go quickly and work, Caesar," she replies.⁴

So it appears that the only failure Caesar is guilty of in the entire play is the failure to make a real woman, a realist, of Cleopatra. But he who is perhaps Shaw's greatest character did his best to do so. The contrast which is obvious between Cleopatra and Caesar in such scenes as the one just quoted makes Caesar's supremacy stand out all the more.

Sometimes he may sound like Shakespeare's Caesar when he says, "He who has never hoped can never despair."⁵ This line is reminiscent of Shakespeare's, "I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd / Than what I fear; for always I am Caesar."⁶

³Shaw, Caesar, p. 128.

⁴Ibid., p. 129.

⁵Ibid., p. 183.

⁶William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, ed. T. S. Dorsch, The Arden Shakespeare, 6th ed. (London, 1955), I.11.208-209.

But Shaw's here is very down to earth, and says things Shakespeare's Julius would never utter: "Taxes," he tells Pothinus, "are the chief business of a conqueror," when the latter wonders why the conqueror of the world bothers with such trivialities.⁷ Granted that Shaw's Caesar has his moments of high praise for himself, as in the sphinx speech; but nowhere in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar does one find him saying things like that. Shaw's Caesar is a great soldier and conqueror, and at the same time an eminently practical man. Shakespeare's Caesar is great too, but he would never have found time to worry about the ordinary things of life like tax collecting. He lacks the human qualities and understanding that Shaw's Caesar has. Nevertheless, of both one can say, "Here was a Caesar! when comes such another?"⁸

When Shakespeare said, "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players,"⁹ the two dramatists parted company. For Shaw wished to do more than just "hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature—to show Virtue her own image"¹⁰

⁷Shaw, Caesar, p. 116.

⁸Shakespeare, Caesar.III.11.254.

⁹William Shakespeare, As You Like It, ed. Horace Howard Furness, The Variorum Edition, (Philadelphia, 1890), II.vii.147-149.

¹⁰William Shakespeare, Hamlet, ed. Horace Howard Furness, The Variorum Edition, 14th ed. (Philadelphia, 1905), III.11.20-23.

Shaw seriously believed that he was impregnating his plays with his philosophy. As Henderson notes:

For the philosophical dramatist of today, it was useless to attempt merely to reflect life as in a mirror, to portray things as they occurred. He must arrange things in such an order to make them both intelligible and memorable, and show their moral significance. He felt that he possessed an advantage over Shakespeare, who used only stories at second hand, and over his contemporaries, who knew nothing of economics, Marxian theories, and the Socialist movement.¹¹

Above all, Shaw decried Shakespeare's fatal omission of prefaces, since without them we will never be able to re-create his philosophy. Said Shaw, "It is for want of this elaboration that Shakespeare, unsurpassed as poet, storyteller, character draughtsman, humorist, and rhetorician, has left us no intellectually coherent drama, and could not afford to pursue a genuinely scientific method in his studies of character and society."¹² One is to believe, then, that the omissions of Shakespeare have been taken care of in his case by the provident Irishman. For, as Chesterton wittily remarks, "Many people know Mr. Bernard Shaw chiefly as a man who would write a very long preface even to a very short play."¹³

¹¹Henderson, pp. 692-693.

¹²Quoted by Henderson, p. 693, but no source is given.

¹³Chesterton, p.1.

People could, if they liked, take Shaw as a pure comic; but he was unperturbed. "The real joke is that I am in earnest."¹⁴ As has been said of Euripides, if social tracts were the popular literature of the day, Shaw would have concentrated his attention on the writing of them. But since people could be reached better by a play, whether seen or read, that is the type of writing to which he chiefly devoted his attention.

The She-Ancient in Back to Methuselah might be said to speak for Shaw:

The She-Ancient. Art is the magic mirror you make to reflect your invisible dreams in visible pictures. You use a glass mirror to see your face: you use works of art to see your soul. But we who are older use neither glass mirrors nor works of art. We have a direct sense of life.¹⁵

To Shaw, verisimilitude was hardly enough to expect from a play. Shaw wished to write comedies filled with ideas drawn from his philosophy. He wished to make people think as well as laugh. This we have by his own admission and quotations from his essays to this effect have been cited by the present author.¹⁶ It has been the intention of the present writer

¹⁴Quoted by Gassner, p. 539, with no source given.

¹⁵These lines are quoted by Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (London, 1952), p. 147.

¹⁶Cf. above, pp. 7, 17, 25, 69.

to show how Shaw's philosophy might be applied to the principal characters of one of Shaw's best plays.

John Mason Brown says that Shaw was never a debunker, regardless of his impertinence. His spirit was positive, his intellect too superior for mere deflating. "Caesar and Cleopatra is a proof of this. However flippant or hilarious its means may be, its concerns are serious and sizeable. For Shaw's real interest, gaily presented in a very funny play, is nothing less than a study of the anatomy of earthly power and greatness."¹⁷

Ervine believes that Shaw transformed the theater far more than Ibsen. The historian of the drama will be compelled to acknowledge the debt which the theater owes to the man whose influence helped to produce an intelligent audience for intelligent plays and intelligent actors to perform them.¹⁸

To these statements one might add the words of Ludwig Lewisohn, who, as early as 1915, realized what Shaw was trying to do: "Mr. George Bernard Shaw is a writer of comedy with a tragic cry in his soul. In the middle ages he would have been a great saint, appalled at the gracelessness of men's hearts, militant for the kingdom of God. Today he is a

¹⁷Brown, Seeing, p. 163.

¹⁸Ervine, p. 397.

playwright, appalled at the muddle-headedness of the race, a fighter for the conquest of reason over unreason, of order over disorder, of economy over waste."¹⁹

Shaw labored over his lines to make them sound effortless when they were spoken. But much thought and effort went into creating this tightly packed prose, grand, noble, brilliant in its wit and thought.

So much for those who speak of Shaw as a philosopher-dramatist. This group is becoming increasingly smaller, especially in the years since Shaw's death in 1950. At the time of the centenary of his birth in 1956, a number of critics decided to shave off some of the Shavian glory. Bernard Shaw, they contended, was not really a realist; he was not a poet; his essential concern was thought, but that thought was inconsistent and muddled.

He attacked marriage and was married only once, though he indulged in thirteen years of free love before his marriage.²⁰ He was against organized religion, but asked frequently for prayers from Dame Laurentia, the Abbess of Stanbrook Abbey, who received letters from "Brother Bernard."²¹ He was always entering the lists for the poor, but was quite wealthy himself.

¹⁹Quoted by Gassner, p. 539, but no reference is given.

²⁰See Ervine, p. 309, for an account of Shaw's personal life.

²¹See "The Nun and the Dramatist," The Atlantic, CXCVIII (July, August 1956), pp. 27-34; 69-76.

The present writer does not wish to condone Mr. Shaw's shortcomings and sins in the least. But it does not seem right to condemn his theory because of his practice. One might recall Rousseau, who sent his children to an orphanage so that he could excogitate his theory on education. The question is rather whether or not Shaw used his plays as vehicles to express his philosophical theories. Many say he did not.

Perhaps the plainest statement of this position is given by Walter Kerr: "I feel that it is almost necessary to separate the 'philosophy' from the plays. . . . My own general belief is that Shaw's comic instinct (as opposed to his ratiocinative powers) took over the moment he passed from the prefatorial thought to the actual playwrighting. We are left with a ground-plan (the thought), a scenario which obviously uses the ground-plan as a springboard, and finally the springing itself, which may depart wildly from the plan."²² Mr. Kerr develops this notion at some length in both How Not to Write a Play and Pieces at Eight. Shaw, according to Mr. Kerr, announced himself as a social realist and major prophet. Therefore, the generation with which Mr. Kerr went to school tried to produce his plays like Stanislavski and always wore turquoise-rimmed glasses to read and discuss them. "And what did we have? An exasperatingly ill-formed charade in which the

²² Personal letter from Mr. Kerr to the author, March 8, 1958. The parentheses are Mr. Kerr's.

message was curiously garbled and even the fun was nervous.

. . . [We] could only conclude that the impractical Irishman was just not a very good playwright."²³

But one evening Mr. Kerr saw an amateur production of Heartbreak House, with a cast that romped through the play with tongue in both cheeks. With a blissfully foolish expression on his face, says Mr. Kerr, he realized that every criticism he had ever heard of Shaw was justified, and that none of them mattered one bit. Shaw had never written an Ibsenesque drama in his life. "His vision was stylized, his language a splendid artifice, his characterization a process of painting and then cutting loose a hundred balloons."²⁴

Mr. Kerr concludes, therefore, that when Shaw wanted to exercise his mental powers, he wrote a preface or a pamphlet. But he was not able to tie himself down to higher thoughts when there was the wonderful arena of comedy to romp in. Mr. Kerr calls this a joke almost too grisly to bear: the comic Shaw tumbling on to become one of the most popular playwrights of his time, while he taught other modern playwrights how to be unpopular. An amateur repertory will always break even with Shaw, he muses, but it will always break its neck with Ibsen, or one of the modern playwrights whom Shaw taught to imitate

²³Kerr, Pieces, pp. 118-119.

²⁴Ibid., p. 119.

the Norwegian. Because Shaw was a unique personality, no one could really follow his practice; but because he was a convincing advocate, many have followed his precept.²⁵

In the opinion of Walter Kerr, Shaw does not belong in the literary company of Chekhov and Ibsen, even though that is where he wished to be. He wound up skipping school in the company of Sheridan and Wilde. To prove his point Kerr cites recent productions of Shaw on Broadway. They have been successful because they have opened the doors to recapturing Shaw's best style: high comedy. Maurice Evans' Man and Superman, Charles Laughton's Major Barbara, and Hardwicke's Caesar and Cleopatra are cases in point. Mr. Kerr bemoans the fact that Olivier's Caesar was a studied "character job" which harkens back to the heavier and graver style of acting Shaw's plays. Such interpretations are to be avoided, as far as Mr. Kerr is concerned.²⁶

The distinguished critic, Max Beerbohm, bears out Kerr: "In his serious plays Mr. Shaw was not himself. . . . I admit that his serious plays were exceedingly good pastiches of Ibsen. . . . Nevertheless, he was not born to write serious plays. He has too irresponsible a sense of humor. This sense he never could have suppressed so utterly as to prevent it from marring his plays; and, as it is his greatest gift, one does not wish

²⁵Kerr, How, p. 35.

²⁶Kerr, Pieces, p. 120.

him to surpress it at all."²⁷

T. S. Eliot once remarked that "Shaw was a poet—until he was born, and the poet in Shaw was stillborn."²⁸ Raymond Williams, who quotes these lines, goes on to castigate Shaw for his opposition to romance because Williams believes that Shaw's plays are full of romantic emotion. He quotes Shaw's own words against him: "One hardly knows which is more appalling: the abjectness of the credulity or the flippancy of the scepticism."²⁹

Many critics speak and write of Shaw's plays, seemingly oblivious to any philosophical implications he may have put into them. They accept his plays and criticize them at face value. None but the scholars like Nethercot mention terms like realist and Philistine when interpreting Shaw's plays. Indeed, Shaw's great friend Sean O'Casey must have been blissfully unaware of Shaw's doctrine when he called him a "fighting idealist."³⁰ It is doubtful that Shaw would have appreciated the term, at least in the sense in which Shaw himself used it. It seems to be the consensus that Shaw's philosophy

²⁷Quoted by Kerr, How, pp. 34-35, but no source is given.

²⁸Quoted by Williams, p. 152, but he cites no reference for this or the next quotation.

²⁹Ibid., p. 153.

³⁰O'Casey, The Green Crow, p. 205.

got misplaced when he began to write his plays. Whatever of his doctrine does appear in the plays is completely overlooked by all but the most discerning members of an audience. Louis Doyle says that even in Shaw's time the audience dismissed the doctrine and enjoyed the sparkling wit of the lines and the charm of Shaw's technical daring. "The doctrinaire became a dramatist in spite of himself."³¹

John Gassner echoes these words in his treatment of Shaw. Shaw the sociological thinker with his perfect blueprint for society was suppressed by Shaw the satirical writer of comedy when the latter's creative imagination began to function. As a thinker Shaw prided himself on his doctrine of realism. As an artist he refused to allow himself to be fettered to realistic technique.

He played the prophet and the imp, not by attacking the people's God, but their household gods, their conventions. "Shaw, in short, was the master of reality, and not its slave."³² He retained the right to be buoyant, free, and inventive.

It would seem, then, that the present writer has superimposed on Caesar and Cleopatra applications of Shaw's philosophy which are not there at all. If one is to accept Walter

³¹ Louis F. Doyle, "G. B. S.'s Lance Against the Windmills," America, XCV (September 29, 1956), 622.

³² Gassner, Treasury, p. 509.

Kerr's opinion entirely, that is just what he has been doing. On the other hand, the present writer cannot admit that Shaw's play is thoroughly submerged in Shavian realism. Obviously there are many sections of the play which do not seem to correspond directly to the Shavian doctrine. Many of the scenes seem to have been included because they make rousing good theater. They can be enjoyed without any recourse to Life Forces and the like. If Shaw began to write Caesar and Cleopatra with the intention of expressing his philosophy, such an intention seems to have been lost at various places in the play where he got taken up with the characters and the dramatic and entertaining elements which he blended together to make it a thoroughly enjoyable stage piece. Indeed it is that.

Stark Young gets rhapsodic when he writes: "There is that supper scene, . . . where the passions and ambitions, the petulances and jealousies and hot, passing beauty and splendor and meanness of the characters' lines are seen against the great forms that their race has evolved architecturally, and against their racial immortality expressed in the sculptured stone, and in the midst of Egypt where the world seems to reveal itself so splendidly."³³

It would be well to examine more closely some of the scenes

³³Stark Young, Immortal Shadows: A Book of Dramatic Criticism (New York, 1948), p. 60.

of the play. This will be helpful in showing how Shaw apparently lost sight of his philosophical bent in some parts of the play, in favor of using to the full the dramatic genius and technical wizardry which were his. In Caesar and Cleopatra Shaw mixes comedy, suspense, melodrama, and spectacle.

The opening scene of the play is amusing, witty, and finally very funny as Cleopatra tries to show Caesar that he is not dreaming that he has met this cute little girl in the moonlight, between the arms of the sphinx. She keeps repeating all the superstitious propaganda she has heard about Caesar to his quiet amusement. Caesar has a nose like an elephant, Cleopatra tells him, and Caesar uncounsciously runs his hand along his nose. The scene is counterpointed by the sound of the Roman battle trumpet, marking the approach of Caesar's legions. This provides for mounting suspense.³⁴

When they reach the palace, the tension mounts as servants and slaves run through the corridors screaming in terror at the thought of the approach of the Romans. Cleopatra trembles as she dresses in her royal robes to meet she knows not what. Then there is that beautiful climax to the scene when she falls gratefully into the arms of the old gentleman whom she did not know was really Julius Caesar all the time.

If one were to pick the finest scene in all of Shaw,

³⁴Shaw, Caesar, p. 105.

this writer would vote unhesitatingly for the one just described. Shaw empties his whole bag of theatrical tricks into it. There is wit, comedy, and suspense. The enchanting setting in the dark, moonlit desert with the great sphinx rising out of the darkness—all of this adds to the total effect. Yet this is the very scene in which one finds Caesar giving Cleopatra her first lessons in realism.

Shaw gets as close to slapstick as he ever came in the third act which ends with everyone jumping off into the sea, while Cleopatra is pushed in head first. Balance this scene with the ending of the fourth act. The voices of the mob are outside the palace, screaming for blood because Cleopatra has ordered Pothinus to be killed. Caesar has repudiated her; she is left alone, whimpering for Ftatateeta. She gets panicky when Ftatateeta does not appear. She snatches a cord and pulls aside the curtain before the altar of Ra. "Ftatateeta is lying dead on the altar of Ra, with her throat cut. Her blood deluges the white stone." ³⁵ Curtain.

Shaw maintained that he always used the formula of exposition, situation, and discussion. But after examining the scenes just described, one can hardly say that Caesar and

³⁵Ibid., p. 186.

Cleopatra is a conversation piece built on that formula.

Most amateur companies do not attempt the play because of the extensive scenery, costumes, and cast which it demands. No wonder some critics thought that the screen version in technicolor lost the play in the pageantry. This writer believes that to do Caesar as it deserves on the stage, one must have a revolving stage, as the Olivier production did, and an entourage resembling the Metropolitan Opera's most ambitious productions of Aida.

These considerations seem to say that Caesar has nothing to do with Shaw's more serious thought. It is a brilliant piece of theater demanding an excellent production and superior actors for the title roles. No less and no more.

But, as in most disagreements, perhaps the answer lies neither in a sharp yes or no, but somewhere in between. It would seem that there are two questions to be answered. To ask if Shaw uses his philosophy in his plays, and in this play in particular, is not enough. We must ask a second question: is a knowledge of Shaw's philosophy necessary to appreciate his plays? Walter Kerr prefers to answer the second question first and skip the first question altogether. He says that a knowledge of Shaw's philosophy is not necessary to appreciate Shaw's plays. He therefore assumes that Shaw did not use his philosophy in his plays.

This writer would prefer to answer the first question first.

Yes, George Bernard Shaw did carry his philosophy into his plays. But as he said himself, he did not wish to do it in such an explicit way as to make them unentertaining. He saw no reason why the cathedral organ must be put out of tune, to recall his own phrase. Hence, there is no reason why a play with a serious meaning cannot be good art and be entertaining also.

Granted, Shaw did get so taken up with the desire to write an entertaining play that the philosophy he started out to exemplify in his play is submerged often in witty and artistic good theater. But it is still there implicitly for those who wish to ponder it. As this writer has already pointed out, some of the actions and speeches in Caesar seem contradictory and strange without recourse to Shaw's philosophy. For example, one might recall Caesar's condemnation of Cleopatra for ordering the death of Pothinus and his commendation of Rufio's slaying of Ftatateeta as a "natural" one. But such seeming inconsistencies are easily passed over when the audience is taken up with the eye-filling acting and brilliant dialogue.

Caesar can easily be taken as a Shavian realist, as Shaw's Preface would indicate. But he can be appreciated by the ordinary theater-goer as a great man or a genius, without being thought of as a realist or a superman following the dictates of the Life Force.

Consequently, in answer to the second question one can respond: Shaw's philosophy is not a necessary background for the ordinary theater-goer in order that he can understand, appreciate, and be entertained by Shaw's plays. As Henderson points out, Shaw wrote his prefaces in some cases after he had written the plays themselves.³⁶ Each is a far-ranging commentary on a whole group of ideas suggested by the theme of the play. "Enjoyment of Shaw's ever-sparkling wit, his coruscating intellect, was in no sense conditioned upon the necessity for acceptance of his philosophy."³⁷

This writer would go so far as to say that the understanding of Shaw's philosophy does not even increase the enjoyment of the play, in some instances. For example, one could more easily appreciate and be amused by Man and Superman without knowing that Shaw was advocating the notion that debauchery was the secret of the popularity of marriage. His St. Joan is more easily enjoyed by those who do not know that he is presenting his Joan as the first Protestant and the first nationalist. One would much prefer to sit back and ignore such issues and be entertained by Shaw's superb dramaturgy.³⁸

³⁶Henderson, p. 763.

³⁷Ibid., p. 465.

³⁸One of the few assets of the recent motion picture of Joan, released July, 1957, was that scenarist Graham Greene omitted these implications.

A grand example is the fabulously successful My Fair Lady, a musical comedy by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe based on Pygmalion.³⁹ Though the musical stays meticulously close to Shaw's original,⁴⁰ few listeners would realize that Shaw's tale of the cockney girl, whom an egotistical speech teacher turns into the belle of the society ball on a bet, is trying to sell the human race on the development of one common language. In that same play Shaw further wished to point out that the class distinction is a "verbal" one, that the only difference between a flower-selling "lidy" and a society debutante is training. "The spectacular success of My Fair Lady indicates that Shaw's plays, when filmed, and adapted for television and musical comedy for stage and screen, will prove to be properties of value scarcely to be estimated."⁴¹

Here, then, is the great paradox of George Bernard Shaw. He tried hard to write comedies with serious ideas underlying them. Chesterton goes so far as to say: "However he may shout

³⁹Opened at the Mark Hellinger Theater on March 15, 1956, in New York.

⁴⁰"My Fair Lady is nothing more than George Bernard Shaw's play Pygmalion with music added. . . . Every line of dialogue, the theme of every lyric is taken from some part of Shaw, though Lerner strayed as far afield as his personal letters and the preface he wrote for the published play." "The Charmer," Time, LXVIII (July 23, 1956), p. 42.

⁴¹Henderson, p. 617.

profanities or seek to shatter the shrines, there is always something about him which suggests that in a sweeter and more solid civilization he would have been a great saint. He would have been a saint of a sternly ascetic, perhaps of a sternly negative type. But he has this strange note of the saint in him: that he is literally unworldly. Worldliness has no human magic for him; he is not bewitched by rank nor drawn on by conviviality."⁴²

This is the same man whose tribute to super-greatness, Caesar and Cleopatra, critics suggested would make a fine libretto for Offenbach. Now the full circle of irony has been completed, for one of Shaw's best plays has served, with only a few minor adjustments, as the book of a successful musical comedy. Is this Shaw's final degradation or his hour of triumph? It depends on how one looks at it.

But this paradox is no more ironic than the man himself. The man himself, like his plays, could be deeply serious and flippantly funny. "He is perhaps a defective character," remarks Chesterton, "but not a mixed one." Chesterton perhaps sums him up as well as anyone ever will: "All the virtues he has are heroic virtues. Shaw is like the Venus of Milo: all that there is of him is admirable."⁴³

⁴²Chesterton, pp. 11-12.

⁴³Ibid., p. 12.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. Gene D. Phillips, S. J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

July 3, 1958
Date

J. P. Marion, SJ
Signature of Adviser